

SERIOUS
REFLECTIONS
ON THE
DANGEROUS TENDENCY
OF THE

Common Practice of *Card-playing*;

Especially of the Game of

ALL-FOURS,

AS IT HATH BEEN

Publickly play'd at OXFORD,

IN THIS PRESENT

Year of our Lord, MDCCLIV.

In a L E T T E R

FROM

G. GYLES SMITH, to his Friend ABRAHAM
NIXON, Esq; of the *Inner Temple*.

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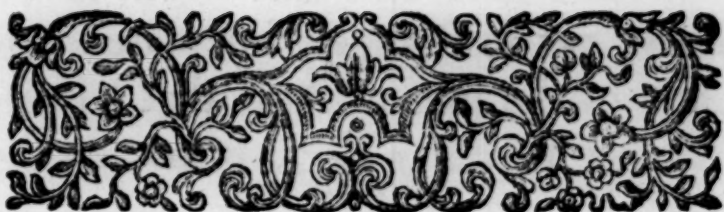
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L E T T E R

F R O M

Mr. *GYLES SMITH*,

TO HIS FRIEND

ABRAHAM NIXON, Esq;
of the Inner Temple.

DEAR SIR!

THOUGH many pious and good
Men have heretofore made it
their serious Endeavour to discourage
the heinous and crying Sin of *Card-*
playing, and have carry'd their Zeal so
far as to call the Cards themselves, by

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no other Name than that of the *Devil's Books*; yet so strangely infatuated is the Taste of the present Age, that I believe no other *Literary Performance* ever yet so much attracted the Thoughts, and Application of it's Readers. That a Volume, consisting of no more than fifty two Pages, unrecommended by any particular Beauty of Style, or Depth of Sentiment, should have so general a Run with the politer and gayer Students, can, I fear, be resolved into nothing but too great a Partiality for the *Author*. And, indeed, it is to be lamented, that few Books are read now-a-days, in the fashionable World, but what, as one may guess, were composed, or dictated, by the same *eminent Genius*; or, at least, by some of his Pupils, and Followers.

It is a melancholy Thing to think, how much all good Learning hath suffered by this unaccountable Attachment.

ment. The Arts and Sciences are either entirely neglected by us, or pursued only in Subordination, or Subserviency, to it. Sir *Isaac Newton* is, deservedly, well spoken of as a painstaking Man: but, alas! how few are there who employ their Leisure and Capacity, in endeavouring to understand him, any farther than as such Knowledge may be conducive to the better calculating of a Bett. Mr. *Pope* too, most certainly has his Merit; yet the generality of polite Men heed him little more than a Pack-horse upon the Road; they hear the Jingle of his Bells and pass on, without thinking of the Treasure he carries. I have frequently thought it odd, that in all the good Company I have kept, I never heard a Line quoted from any Part of him, unless, now and then an accidental one, from his beautiful and accurate Description of the Game of *Ombre*. There is a whole Set of Men
amongst

amongst us, many of whom are of undoubted Learning and Abilities, who have spent their whole Lives in explaining *One Book*, for which no Man now cares *One Farthing*. These *poor Gentlemen*, and their Writings, are entirely neglected by the present Race of Students; for it is agreed, by all *Masters of Reason*, and Criticks in the *Doctrine of Chances*, that *they* must have thrown away their Time very idly, who have been gaping after some supposed future Contingencies, while they should have been minding their own present Business. And, indeed, he that, instead of attending to the *Cards in his Hand*, will be thinking how he shall play for a greater Stake *next Week*, must have extraordinary Luck, if he is not commonly a Loser.

On the other Hand, the *Books* I am here treating of are in the highest Request with all Ranks and Orders of
People,

People, from the Duke at *Wh--te's*, to the Porter in the Night-Cellar; from the Duchefs in the Drawing-Room, to the Cinder-Wench on the Dunghill. To facilitate the Use and Understanding of them, the World is also furnish'd with a most valuable *Commentary*, by the never-enough-commended Industry and Benevolence of Mr. *Edmund Boyle*; *Hoyle's* so that they are now *made easy to the* *Traveller.* *meanest Capacities.* A Taste, therefore, so universal must merit the Attention of every one who hath his Country at Heart, as its Influence, whether good or bad, is of very general Concern to the Publick.

But, to drop the Metaphor (for I think it seems to be almost drawn to the Dregs) it is, Sir, the serious Design of this Letter, to demonstrate the dangerous Tendency of this prevailing Practice of *Card-playing*. And, I doubt not, by that Time you have perus'd the

the few Pages that follow, that you will agree with me, that most of the Corruptions of the Age, which we are continually complaining of, may very naturally be deduc'd from it, and that it is, in its Principles and Effects, most truly *Antichristian* and *Devilish*.

I beg, however, before we proceed any farther, that nothing I have hitherto said, or shall say, upon this Subject, may be constru'd as discountenancing the Practice of *Gaming*. I am sure nothing can be farther from my Thoughts, and Intentions, than the least Hint to that Purpose. It hath always been my Opinion, that every Gentleman hath a *Right* of disposing of his Lands, Tenements, and Monies, in what Manner he pleaseth, and of transferring them to another, upon any Terms and Conditions which may be agreed upon between them. Thus it will always be in a free Country, and thus

thus it *ought* to be, and if this is the Case, where is the great Enormity of *Gaming*? For my Part, I have always look'd upon a *Gaming-House* in no other Light than as an *Office of Conveyancing*, where Gentlemen may go, and transact Business of this Sort, without the Forms and Incumbrances of the Law, and (as you will allow) with as little Danger of being cheated, as in the more regular, and legitimate Method.

But *Gaming* may subsist very well without *Card-playing*, as they have not the least necessary Dependence or Connection with each other. *Gaming* is nothing but the hazarding a Sum of Money, on the Decision of any dubious Question, which is frequently call'd *Betting*; and every one knows, who knows any Thing of the World, that there is nothing in Heaven above, or on Earth beneath, or in the Waters under the Earth, appertaining to Life, or Death,

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to Things past, present, or to come,
but what will *admit of a Bett.*

But, to recur to our Point. It was the Wisdom of the Antients to make their *Games* and *Plays* so many Methods of Instruction to their Youth, in all private and publick Virtue. Thus the young Gentlemen, of *Greece* and *Rome*, were taught Justice, Fortitude, Temperance, Patience, and Love of their Country, even at their *Pastimes*, as we may read, more at large, in the elaborate Dissertations of *Marescottus*, *Panvinus*, and *Julius Cæsar Bulenger*. But how differently Things are contriv'd among us, will soon appear, when it shall be evident, from the few Hints I shall produce, that there is scarce a Game, upon the Cards, which is not fram'd to contribute, in some Instance or other, to the tainting our Morals, or corrupting our Politicks.

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I shall say nothing, though I think a great deal might be said, on two or three Circumstances, which sound very untowardly, and which are generally introductory to Games of this Sort; I mean *Cutting*, and *Shuffling*, and *Turning up*.

The whole Game of WHIST is founded upon the most iniquitous, and detestable Principles. In this, as in most others, the Victory is, in a great Measure, determin'd by the *Number of Tricks*. And though it sounds well, when we are told how much *Honours* are concern'd in it, yet, when we examine Things to the Bottom, we shall find that these *Honours* add very little Credit and Reputation to the System. They are, as well as I remember, in Number four, *viz.* The *Ace*, the *King*, the *Queen*, and the *Knave*. What a Confusion have we here of Rank and

Order! What a Mixture of High and Low, Royalty and Meanness, Beauty and Impudence! I believe it is not in the Power of the greatest *Antiministerial Malice* to compose a stronger Satyr against Courts and Courtiers, than what we have compriz'd in this abusive Representation of them. And though perhaps it may *sometimes* happen, that it may too nearly resemble the Truth and Reality of Things, yet surely it is not very politick, in any Government, to suffer such Representations to become common, and subject to the Inspection of the lowest of the People.

There are other Games, which seem compos'd on Purpose to shock the Modesty, or, at least to give an *unlucky* Bias to the Ideas of the younger Part of both Sexes. To name two of these will be sufficient, as my own Delicacy will not suffer me to dwell long upon them. And, indeed, I could not have per-

persuaded myself to have gone thus far, but that I think any Female Reader, into whose Hands this Letter may happen to fall, will *easily* be intreated to suffer her Eyes to jump over the following Words in Italics, viz. *Laugh, and lie down, and My Lady's Hole.*

I could go on to mention the Immoralities, or Indecencies, of almost every Game upon the Cards, which I ever had any Knowledge of or Insight into: But I shall confine myself, for what remains, to two or three, in which Vice and Villainy are professedly encourag'd, and made the Characteristics of the *swaggering Heroe* of them.

There is nothing more necessary, than that something like *Poetical Justice* should be kept up, in all Games calculated for public and general Entertainment. But to have a Fellow, with the very Name of KNAVE upon him, strutting through the Croud, with his Hat cock'd,

cock'd, and his Arms a-kimbo, loaded with Power, and the Trophies of the Day, is an Insult on all Virtue and Decency, as well as a Breach of all regular Criticism.

The first Instance I shall give of this Sort is in the favourite Game of BRAG. Here the Power of the KNAVE is so great, that he is usually call'd a *Maker*. The Meaning is, that, whatever Company he comes into, he is enabled to make himself one of them. He is a *Queen*, with *Queens*; a *King*, with *Kings*; and an *Ace*, with *Aces*. He gives Power, where it is not; and doubles it, where it is. In short, his Influence is so great, that he may truly be call'd the *Fac totum*, or *Prime Minister* of the Pack; and the Politicks of the Game are conducted accordingly; *Honesty* and *Simplicity* are cheated and abused, while the Favours of Fortune are shower'd down on *Hectoring* and *Impudence*.

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The next Game I shall mention is that of BEAT THE KNAVE OUT OF DOORS. Here, if we could judge of Things by their Names, one would imagine the KNAVE should meet with *his Deserts*. But, instead hereof, in this very Game, the KNAVE has the sole Command, and cannot be *beat out of Doors*, but must, of Necessity, carry his Point at all Events. Let me ask, therefore, may not this promising Appellation, falsely impos'd upon it, draw in an honest Man, inadvertently to engage in this Game; where (if the KNAVE happens to be on the other Side) he is sure to come off by the worst? And, doth not so gross a Prevarication intimate the Author, to be none other than the *Father of Lies*?

I come now, Sir, to the last Game I shall take Notice of, in which the KNAVE is predominant, and which, you will perceive, was the chief Object I had in View, when I first sat down to trouble you with this *Epistolary Dissertation*.

tation. I wish Mr. *Hoyle* had obliged us with some Directions and Observations upon it, in his ingenious *Commentary*; because, though I attended closely to a *Match*, that was play'd here some Time ago, on a *publick Stage*, yet I could form to myself no Idea of the *Powers of the Cards*, or the *Laws of the Game*.

The Cards were dealt on both Sides, and the Trump turn'd up. Then one of the Parties *begged something*, on which there was some farther Stirr with the Cards; and a Friend of the same Party whisper'd that he was safe enough, for he had got *His Heels*. This, it seems, is a Cant Name for the KNAVE, as being one, I suppose, that should be laid *by the Heels*. However, what he then meant I knew not. But, when the Deal was out, and, on casting up the whole, there appear'd a great Inequality, to my unspeakable Surprize, each Side *scored up two*. I was mightily sollicitous to
know

know the Reason of this ; when a Person, who stood near me, told me the Game was called ALL FOURS. That it was true, as I had observed, the *Gentleman in Blue* had won the *Game*, and was the *Highest* ; but the Power of the KNAVE was so great, that, if he took Part with the *Lowest*, he became equal to *Highest* and *Game*. During the playing of the Cards, another Thing fell out that gave me great Offence ; which was an Attempt, by an half-concealed Lye, to impose upon the Adversary. For the Party which had the KNAVE was overheard to swear, that he had also the *King* ; whereas it appeared afterwards, that the *King* lay by in the Stock, and had no Share at all in the Play.

If such Things are allow'd, this Game, at least, is of *Hellish Extraction*, whatever may be thought of the Cards. To make the *Lowest* equal to the *Highest*, is a shameful Defiance of Justice and Common Sense : And the false Insinuation, about the *King*, was an Insult on

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Royal Majesty itself ; as if that might be prostituted to serve the vile Purposes of a KNAVE. We know, Sir, in what Book we are instructed, *to honour the King as Supreme*. Whose Books then must they be, that teach, that a KNAVE may be set above him ? This I need not tell you. Yet such is the avow'd Doctrine of these execrable Games. It is a Maxim, *That the King can do no Wrong*. These Books teach quite the contrary. They represent him as the Tool of a Parcel of *Tricksters*, and, in a most profane Manner, make the sacred Name of *His Majesty*, subordinate to the low Nick-name of *His Heels*.

One Thing more, which I had like to have omitted, was so extraordinary a Circumstance in the Process of this particular Game, that, I am told, it was never practised before, or since, in any Country. Towards the Close of the Play, the *Fellow in Green*, who had the KNAVE on his Side, perceiving himself left far behind by his Antagonist, stood
up

up in a Rage, and, seizing on a *Heap of refuse Cards* that lay by him, began playing them away, *swearing* and *damning*, and *damning* and *swearing*, till he was black in the Face. Thus he went on for a considerable Time by himself, and insisted, at last, that every one of them shou'd be reckon'd into his Account.

The Company now began to shake their Heads, and all agreed that so scandalous a Proceeding had never been seen before in this World. This Effort, however, served no Manner of Purpose; for, after all, a great Superiority remain'd on the Side of the *Gentleman in Blue*.

You begin, Sir, by this Time, to agree with me, that some Stop ought to be put to the extravagant Spirit of *Card-playing*; or, at least, that some Discouragement should be shewn to such Games, as manifestly tend to corrupt the Principles and Morals of the People, to subvert all Order and Authority, and confound the Notions of Right and

Wrong. For my Part, I fear I shall live to see the Time, when our Manners shall be form'd, entirely, on the Principles of Pips, and painted Paper; and that it will be said of us, (according to the Sentiment of an *ingenious Writer*, on a *similar Occasion*) *We do not make the Cards, but the Cards make Us*. Those Persons, however, that introduc'd this vile Practice, contrary to Law, into this Place, in the Face of all our Youth, will, we hope, be animadverted on by the proper Authority. If these are not the establish'd Rules of Play, there was foul Play in what I saw; for *that Game* was play'd as I have told You.

I have often puzzled myself in guessing at the Meaning of an Expression in *Peter Bungay's Book, De Mysteriis numerorum*; towards the clearing of which, this Accident may possibly afford some Light. After treating on the Numbers 3, 7, and 6, (on which last he dwells very long, in explaining the *Number of the Beast* in the *Revelations*) he has these Words.

Words. *Haftenus de numero Bestiæ* 666. *Multa etiam de numero 4, notatu baud indigna, dici possunt: qui numerus, etsi non tantundem valeat quàm numerus 6, ad eundem tamen quodammodò referri potest.* If that learned Man liv'd to compleat his Remarks on the Number 4, they have not reached our Times. But this obscure Passage seems to hint that 4 might be the distinguishing Mark of some inferior *Dæmon*, as 6 was of the Supreme, though his Power was less as 4 to 6, and be referred ultimately to the same, i. e. *the Beast*. Conjectures in Things of this Nature must be very uncertain. But it is more than probable, that the learned Dr. *Henry More* had this in his Eye, when he said, *Non sequitur ex eo quod numerus Bestiæ non invenitur super nos, quòd partes Bestianas nullâ ex parte agimus.* That is, *Though the Number of the Beast be not found upon us (which is all Sixes, and ours may be only all Fours) it doth not follow, that we in no wise play the Part*
 I am

of the Beast; (since *Four* is two third Parts of *Six*.)

I am farther confirm'd in the judicious *Bungay's* Opinion of a Mystery being contain'd in the Number 4, and that it may be a Mark of some evil Spirits; by observing that the Great Monarchies of the World were *four*; all Enemies to Truth, and Supporters of Idolatry; and all characterized, in Scripture, under the Figures of *Beasts*. The solemn Games of *Greece* were *four*. These were *publick Contests*, which were held sacred, and introduced by offering Sacrifices to their Gods: And this, we know, was sacrificing unto *Devils*. And, it is remarkable, that the *Epigrammatist*, in speaking of them, repeats the Word *four*, as if something more than ordinary was intended by it. It had been sufficient, one would think, to have said, *There are in Greece Four solemn sacred Games*: But he says,

ΤΕΣΣΑΡΕΣ εἰσὶν ἀγῶνες ἐν Ἑλλάδι,
ΤΕΣΣΑΡΕΣ ἱεροί. All

All this, I say, induces me to believe that there is something in the Number 4 agreeable to the Nature of impure and noxious Spirits; and he that will force Things out of their natural Course, in Order to introduce that Number, cannot be said *partes Bestianas nulla ex parte agere*.

What Weight these Authorities may have with You, Sir, who seldom trouble your Head with Books out of your Profession, or what may be your Sentiments of the Explication I have here given of these difficult Passages, I know not. For my own Part, I am fully convinced that Cards are justly stiled the *Devil's Books*; and that this Game in particular, of ALL FOURS, is big with all the Evils that the *Beast* can bring upon the Earth.

Indeed so much convinced are we, in this Country, of the Danger the Nation is in, if Things are suffered to go on at this Rate, that we are actually applying to P-----t for the Redress of so enormous

mous a Grievance. We shall supplicate that august Body, for the utter Extirpation of that *detestable Game*, as it was play'd amongst us; for very strict Regulations for playing it for the future, if it can be, in any Shape, tolerated; particularly, to restrain the exorbitant Power of the KNAVE; and, to prescribe some easy Method, on proper Occasions, for *catching Him*.

We hope, Sir, all our Friends of the *Law*, and all, who have any Regard for our Constitution, for the Honour of the *King*, and the Welfare of the Country will assist us in this Attempt. For, should we fail in it; should these diabolical Proceedings meet with no Discountenance from a *Br-t-sh* H---e of C--m---ns; it will be Time for us to cry out, *Actus est de republica*; or, in plain *English*,
THE GAME IS UP.

OXFORD,
November 19,
1754.

I am, Sir,

Your most humble Servant,

GYLES SMITH